

THE MANEUVER ENHANCEMENT BRIGADE AND ITS ROLE IN STABILITY AND SUPPORT OPERATIONS

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**THE MANEUVER ENHANCEMENT BRIGADE AND ITS ROLE IN STABILITY AND
SUPPORT OPERATIONS**

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The evolution of the military toward embracing stability operations has been characterized by both policy decisions—internalizing the lessons learned from the experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan—and projections of future conflicts. The U.S. Army continues to learn and adapt lessons from the last seven years of sustained operations. The importance of stability operations in determining the overall operational success in today's environment has emerged as one of the largest lessons. The result has been a new doctrinal approach to military operations that emphasizes the role of stability operations. Consequently, new combat organizations are needed to successfully achieve our nation's goals and protect the American people. One organization that has emerged from this evolution is the Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (MEB). The MEB has emerged as potential answer to the question of what is the correct stabilization force, and it has the potential to meet the challenges of the future post-conflict security environments.

THE MANEUVER ENHANCEMENT BRIGADE AND ITS ROLE IN STABILITY AND SUPPORT OPERATIONS

The U.S. military's major combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq were initially quick, effective, and successful, while follow-on phases have been challenging. Winning the war was relatively easy, establishing the peace has proved to be much more difficult, owing to both the rapidly changing nature of war and the specific problems this dynamic environment imposes on the current organization of the U.S. military. While the U.S. military had experienced conflict short of major combat operations—such as peacekeeping operations and stability and support operations—it was organized and trained to win major wars against nation state opponents. For example, the military force used in Desert Storm was created to succeed against Cold War opponents on the plains of central Europe. The overwhelming success of this force against Iraq validated the Cold War model of military operations, which subsequently influenced the training, doctrine, and force structure of the U.S. military that entered into post 9-11 combat operations. Military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq did not fit the traditional ideas of offensive and defense operations: the military needed to adapt and change to achieve our national aims in both countries. This change included embracing stability operations in both planning and execution.

Joint doctrine defines *stability operations* as various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief.¹ The lack of stability operational planning and execution began to effect overall

mission success at the conclusion of major combat operations. In Afghanistan and Iraq, “Failure to establish area security concurrent with destruction of the enemy control set back plans to restore essential services and emboldened opponents of U.S. occupation.”² Battalion and brigade commanders noticed the tactical effects of not rapidly following up security success with the meeting of population needs at the local level. These leaders quickly realized that establishing public services such as trash collection, power, potable water, hospital administration, and public education were necessary objectives needed to meet the basic needs of the population, begin the transition to stability, and prevent further violence. In both theatres, the basic force used to conduct these stability operations were Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) composed of traditional combat forces from infantry, armor, cavalry, and artillery units. These units were designed to establish security. Consequently, they were not focused or resourced on accomplishing important stability tasks such as restoring essential services, developing infrastructure, and supporting the reestablishment of government and economic systems. The other brigade sized units that did have stability and reconstruction focus—such as Divisional Engineer Brigades and Civil Affair Brigades—were very few and operated mostly at the national level in major cities such as Baghdad. The result was a deficient and inconsistent stabilization effort throughout the country that created a permissive environment for insurgency. The factors of poor post-conflict planning and lack of critical stabilization forces caused the military to lose the initial security successes achieved through regime change, and opened a door of opportunity for enemy forces to further destabilize the countries.

As insurgencies in both Afghanistan and Iraq gained a foothold, the policies and strategies at the national level began to shift. In turn, this changed the military approach to stability operations in both theaters. The President, through the National Security Strategy, provided the military and the rest of the government clear direction on post conflict operations: “Once peace has been restored, the hard work of post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction must begin. Military involvement may be necessary to stop bloody conflict, but peace and stability will last only if follow-on efforts to restore order and rebuild are successful.”³ The President’s emphasis on stabilization directed the military to reshape policy and strategy. It also paved the way for the Department of Defense Directive 3000.05 (DODD 3000.05), which states that stability operations are a core U.S. military mission that shall be given priority comparable to combat operations, addressed and integrated into doctrine, organizations, training, education, exercises, material, leadership, personnel, facilities, and planning.⁴

This clear guidance, as well as events on the ground, helped focus Joint and Army doctrine on the importance of stability operations to the current security environment in the War on Terror. DODD 3000.05 placed stability operations on equal footing with combat operations and elevated its level of importance to gain adequate attention and resources.

The evolution of the military toward embracing stability operations has been characterized by both policy decisions—internalizing the lessons learned from the experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan—and projections of future conflicts. Two specific results are 1) a different doctrinal approach to military operations emphasizing the role of stability and 2) the formation of new organizations that will allow the Army to be more

successful in achieving our nation's goals and protecting the American people. One organization that has emerged from this progression is the Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (MEB). This brigade-sized organization was designed to "enable, enhance, and protect the operational and tactical freedom of action of the supported force," to meet the specific needs of commanders, and to support full spectrum operations—with the additional caveat of including stability operations as one of its core missions.⁵ This new organization has tremendous potential, and in order to understand the significance of the MEB for both current and future stability operations, it is important to understand the evolution and organizational adaptation that occurred in the military concerning the role of stability operations.

Doctrinal Changes

Historically, the U.S. Army has participated in stability operations far more often than conventional wars.⁶ Recent analysis, however, suggests that an institutional and ideological bias in the leadership ranks existed against this activity. The focus on stability doctrine has been blurred because, "the U.S. military...viewed these activities as separate and detracting from its primary warfighting mission...The result has been an inability to train, equip, and plan for these operations properly."⁷ The events in Iraq and Afghanistan have begun to change this attitude and culture, and the senior leadership in the Department of Defense has emphasized the military's role in stability. Secretary of Defense Gates stated in a recent speech:

Whether in the midst of or in the aftermath of any major conflict, the requirement for the U.S. Military to maintain security, provide aid and comfort, begin reconstruction, and stand up local government and public services will not go away. Even with better funded State Department and U.S.A.I. D., future military commanders will no more be able to rid themselves of these tasks than Eisenhower was.⁸

Leaders and soldiers on the ground were rediscovering some of the same lessons that their predecessors learned in previous stability operations. When these leaders rotated back from combat zones, they sparked Army doctrinal transformation from within by introducing changes at the training centers to merge doctrine with tactical and operational needs. In the 2008 U.S. Army posture statement, the Army said it had incorporated stability operations tasks and scenarios for units training to deploy; established a Stability Operations Division within the Army Deputy Chief of Staff G3; expanded the mandate of the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute to serve as the center of excellence for mastering stability, security, transition, reconstruction, and peace operations; and established the Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance to serve as the DoD's center of excellence and the U.S. Armed Forces focal point to international security force assistance missions.⁹

In 2008, the Army published its newest edition of Field Manual 3.0 Operations with the idea of inculcating the idea of full spectrum operations—that included offensive, defensive, and stability operations—into the vernacular of current Army culture. The doctrine states in the introduction:

Success in future conflicts will require the protracted application of all the instruments of national power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic. Because of this, Army doctrine now equally weights task dealing with the population—stability or civil support—with those related to offensive and defensive operations. This parity is critical; it recognizes that 21st century conflict involves more than combat between armed opponents.¹⁰

The idea of full spectrum operations also addressed the relationships and interaction with the population, friendly forces, and enemy forces in a complex, dynamic environment. This doctrine forces us to take a holistic approach to conflict and post-

conflict operations. America benefits from peace and globalization, and “The challenge...is gradually to bring such areas of the world that exist beyond the pale of the globalized world into the modern integrated structures of planetary civilization.”¹¹

In October 2008, the U.S. Army released a new doctrinal manual “Field Manual 3-07 Stability Operations,” that underscored the close connection among offensive, defensive, and stability operations.¹² The 2008 doctrine merely stated ideas that had already been embraced by the tactical forces operating in both combat theatres. Commanders at all levels recognized early in their operational deployments that success hinged on understanding and mastering the fundamental task associated with stability operations. These key tasks properly identified in the doctrine are to establish civil security, establish civil control, restore essential services, provide support to governance, and support economic and infrastructure development.¹³ Further study by Binnendijk and Johnson echoed these points, claiming that military units must simultaneously conduct the following tasks: 1) suppress, defeat, or destroy elements that resist the emergence of a new society or simply promote anarchy, 2) establish law and order, 3) repair damage to infrastructure that is essential to the emergence of a new social order, and 4) establish an effective interim government.¹⁴ There are three critical points worth noting. First, simultaneity is stressed: there can be no conceptual or practical gap between combat and stability operations. Second, the Army must utilize the resources and support the efforts of other interagency and non-governmental organizations. Third, in the absence of supporting organizations, commanders must be prepared to address the task with internal means. These ideas of military writers, such

as Hans Binnendijk, Stuart Johnson, and Douglas Macgregor, are echoed in the current doctrine.

Doctrinal changes have an impact not just on how the Army views stability operations, but also on how it organizes for missions. Identifying the key set of stabilization tasks allowed the Army to focus on developing an organizational structure to meet these demands. In Afghanistan today, the five core stabilization tasks are being carried out by several different organization models and units. These different organizations were individually developed to achieve specific tasks of stability operations. To understand the potential of an organization such as the MEB, it is important to examine the evolution of these prior organizations. Three organizations—Brigade Combats Teams, Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), and Military Transition Teams (MTTs)—are fulfilling the majority of stability tasks, and it is important to understand their contributions as well as their deficiencies. Each has made significant contributions to their specific tasks, but none has proved versatile enough to address all aspects of stability operations adequately.

Development of Stabilization Forces

Brigade Combat Teams. Initially in Iraq and Afghanistan, stability operations were executed by BCTs. BCTs are combat forces that are the building blocks of the Army's Modularity concept, and are generally formed from combat forces and augmented with combat support enablers such as military police, civil affairs, or other forces as needed. BCTs, by design, are best suited for traditional war fighting tasks. But the realities of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have forced those units to shoulder the tasks associated with stability operations. Two common criticisms of conventional

forces stabilization capabilities are: 1) over-focus on the kinetic/combat approach to security operations and 2) insufficient numbers of specialized troops to conduct the other stabilization and reconstruction tasks.

The doctrine of relying on combat units for stability and reconstruction operations as they complete their combat missions served us well in the past, but for rapid decisive operations it is an unsatisfactorily sequential and largely ad hoc approach...Combat commands need a dedicated command, tailored specifically for post-conflict operations, that is readily deployable and available for planning, training, and exercising.¹⁵

Getting the right force to the correct place on the battlefield has always been the challenge of military planners. The BCT's greatest contribution to stability operations is their ability to establish security. But oftentimes in stabilization operations the best force suited for security operations is not optimal for the other long-term stabilization tasks.

Current doctrine states: "The BCT is designed for combined arms combat. However, as a versatile and flexible force, it also can conduct stability operations very effectively. The BCT will likely have to focus on simultaneous combat and stability operations."¹⁶ This doctrine speaks more to what BCTs could become in the future rather than to what they are accomplishing on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan today. Army leaders have mitigated the difficulty of stabilization operations through planning, task organization, training, and creation of new organizations to ensure that the BCT has the right force for its mission set. One such organization to emerge out of the need for more effective stability forces is the PRT.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams. As stated earlier, BCTs struggled to be both an initial invasion and stabilization force. In the case of Afghanistan, the U.S. led coalition made the decision to develop and deploy PRTs in 2002—in order to respond to

stabilization needs in the provinces, which had little contact with the limited number of Internal Security Assistance Forces (ISAF).¹⁷

The PRT is a combined civil-military organization designed to operate in semi-permissive environments at the conclusion of major combat operations.¹⁸ Its primary objectives are to extend the authority of the Afghan central government, improve security, and promote reconstruction.¹⁹ PRTs are multinational in nature and have become the model used by the U.S., NATO, and other coalition member for post-conflict reconstruction, security, and development tasks in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today there are 26 in Afghanistan—12 led by the U.S. and the remaining headed by NATO's International Security Assistance Force. Military personnel lead most of the U.S. PRTs, and they report to the BCT that controls the area in which they operate. The non-military members of the PRT, or the PRTs that are not guided by military personnel, report to their respective agencies.²⁰ U.S. PRTs receive direction from representatives of the Department of State (DOS), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), but the PRT commander, operating at the provincial level, has primary authority over security decisions.²¹

PRTs have been instrumental in fulfilling the critical need of furthering the influence of the Afghanistan government through election support, infrastructure improvement, and conflict mediation, but the organization is not without problems. The initial PRT idea showed great potential in theory, but from the beginning it had organizational and conceptual flaws. As one expert observed, “The impression,” given by the Coalition Headquarters, “was that the PRTs were to be observing and facilitating

everything—being all things to all people—but not actually accomplishing anything vital to the political or military missions.”²² More specifically, criticism PRT approach to stability operations included disjointed and ad hoc approach to restoring civil control, essential services, support to governance, and economic and infrastructure development; military and civilian operators not trained or lacking the skills for the essential tasks; and no long-range focus on development, inconsistent mission statements, unclear roles and responsibilities, and limited resources. All of these have directly limited PRTs potential contributions.²³

In Afghanistan, Lieutenant General David Barno saw the need for an organization like the PRT in 2003, and he sought to change the unit’s attitude that PRTs were a “civil affairs thing.” To rectify the PRTs shortcomings, he increased their number and sought to change their strategic context by enforcing the idea of unity of command and placing the PRTs under the brigade commander.²⁴ While his efforts alone were not enough to fix the PRT, this type of thinking identified an organizational need required by the military for stabilization operations. In 2004, Charles L. Barry said the military needed dedicated, tailored commands to execute post conflict stabilization and reconstruction operations, readily-deployable units both to establish control and combat and prevent lawlessness and anarchy.²⁵

Military Transition Teams. MTTs, often referred to as the advisory training program, were deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq with the mission to train, advise, equip, and mentor security forces.²⁶ In certain cases they work for the BCTs and in others they simply operate in the BCTs’ battle space. MTTs are the long-term solution to security issues in Afghanistan. Their ability to train the military and police force is critical to

establishing societal peace and order. The MTT actions in training host-nation security forces directly address the core stability task of security. However, the small number of trainers available, many of whom are not often specialized in training police or military, is a disadvantage. In September 2007, a team of Army officers evaluating the advisor training program concluded that the wrong soldiers were being chosen for advisor training and that their training was poor, “seriously undermining the effectiveness” of the overall training mission and “fundamentally detracting from the U.S. strategy for transition in Iraq.”²⁷ While need for host nation security force training is essential—and the MTT concept has great potential for fulfilling that critical need—it represents another ad hoc organization that exists outside the current forces’ structure and doctrine. The optimal force for conducting stabilization operation in Afghanistan will combine the security capacity of the BCT, the training capacity of the MTT, and the PRT capacities for government, infrastructure, and economic development. One possible stability force described by Richard L. Kugler calls for, “a set of four battalions of military police, construction engineer, civil affairs, medical support, psychological operations, and other assets that commonly are needed for the tasks,” which he believes would require “about 11,300 personnel.”²⁸ This description describes the possible task organization of the MEB and highlights the potential of this new organization.

Maneuver Enhancement Brigade as the Primary Stabilization Force

In August 2003, the Army began efforts to overhaul its division-based structure. Before 2003 an Army division was highly integrated, which made it difficult to extract and deploy an individual unit while leaving the rest of the division capable for simultaneous deployment in another area. The Army needed to become an

expeditionary force to meet the demands of current and future operations, and this required an overall structural reorientation. Therefore, the Army established “smaller, more versatile formations able to deploy more promptly” to meet specific combat needs.²⁹ The new organizational model focused on modular brigade-sized units that are rapidly deployable, agile, tailorable, scalable, versatile, and more self-contained than larger divisional units.³⁰ Since BCTs were primarily designed as base building blocks for combat forces, the MEB was designed as a multifunctional brigade to fulfill combat support roles such as stability operations.

The MEB concept was developed as part of Task Force Modularity study in an effort to develop modular support brigades to provide both functional and reinforcing capabilities to brigade combat teams.³¹ The MEB, as described in initial Army Doctrine, is designed as a command and control headquarters with a multifunctional brigade staff that is focused on conducting maneuver support operations, which include key capabilities of protection, movement and maneuver, and sustainment functions to enhance freedom of action.³²

Its doctrinal mission is to conduct maneuver support operations, support area operations, consequence management operations, and stability operations for the supported force.³³ The focus on stability operations as a key doctrinal task makes this organization unique. Within the core task of stability operations, the subtasks the MEB is equipped and required to perform include establishing civil security and control, restoring essential services, providing support to ensure good governance, and supporting economic and infrastructure development.³⁴ Based on the doctrinal description of the MEB, the Army has designed an organization that would address the

complexities of a stabilization environment better than any other unit that is currently in existence. With the MEB, Corps and theater commanders have a flexible force that can be employed in a number of different scenarios.

In order for the MEB to conduct key stabilization operations, it must be task-organized with the correct battalions and companies to accomplish the mission. The forces tasked-organized into the MEB would come from either the division or the theatre commander based on his mission analysis. A possible task-organization specifically designed for stability operation would include two engineer battalions, a military police battalion, a tactical combat force battalion, a civil affairs battalion, and other combat service support companies.³⁵ This organization—specifically designed to conduct stabilization operations—closely resembles stabilization forces recommended by Binnendijk and Johnson and others in a study conducted in 2004. There would still need to be some additional augmentation by interagency agencies to maximize the effect, but the design of the MEB facilitates the accomplishment of the key tasks associated with stability operations.

The MEB combines the best stability aspects of the BCT, PRT, and MTT. Further, overall stabilization capability is increased through its additional reconstruction skill sets—such as engineers and additional military police—while eliminating friction caused by multiple commands. The issues of unity of effort and command, training and level of expertise, and gaps in task coverage can be mitigated by the MEB. According to doctrine, the MEB, if organized properly, can bring many critical capabilities of several disparate organizations under one command. The special skills and additional enablers, combined with a staff trained on the employment of those additional enablers, have a

great potential to make this an effective force in stability operations. The MEB was designed to “enable, enhance, and protect the operational and tactical freedom of action of the supported force.”³⁶ Thus, the MEB has the mission, the command and control structure, and the specialized forces required to conduct stability operations.

How the MEB Contributes to the Overall Operations

The MEB is a unique organization that gives division, corps, and theatre commanders a flexible force capability to conduct full spectrum operations. The MEB is designed to be an important element in aiding mobility during offensive and defensive operations. Then, when the major combat has concluded, the MEB has the tools to rapidly transition into stability operations. The MEB relevance for all aspects of military operations makes it a critical force for the combatant commander.

Role in Transition to Stability Operations. In the pace of transitions, timing is critical and the ability to move rapidly from the end of major combat operation into stability operations enhances the ability to establish order and prevent an insurgency or other disruptive forces from taking hold. One school of thought argues that the current U.S. Army transformation process of developing smaller, deployable packages with fewer troops may actually leave commanders short of critical manpower as they transition into manpower-intensive stability operations.³⁷ The MEB can overcome of the problems associated with rapid transition by providing the division or corps commander with a capable transition force for stability operations. “Early success in establishing societal security, a sense of governmental power, and economic stimulus through job formation is essential in any post conflict setting.”³⁸ In both Afghanistan and Iraq, there were no operational pauses at the end of major combat operation. The Army lacked

time to either deploy additional stability units or to develop a unit fitted exactly to the specific environment. Those forces must be pre-formed and tasked for immediate employment at the end of major combat operations, or, if needed, in a preemptive role.

Role in Establishing Civil Security. The MEB, as part of a larger stability force, can effectively transition to stability operations by contributing to the establishment of civil security. The establishment of civil security is twofold, in that it has the “initial” task of securing the environment, which then dovetails into a “transformational” task of developing host-nation security capacities.³⁹ Overall, the task is critical in setting the conditions for other stabilization activities to succeed. “Establishing a safe and secure environment is the primary mission of the military in stabilization and reconstruction operations. Security is a precondition for economic development, building democratic institutions, and rule of law.”⁴⁰ Security includes both individual and collective protection, and prevents violence from disrupting efforts to support the host nation. Establishing civil security is the first step in stability operations. Doctrine describes its task as, “...provid[ing] for the safety of the host nation and its population, including protection from internal and external threats; it is essential to providing as safe and secure environment....and protecting individuals and facilities deemed crucial to reconstruction”.⁴¹ The MEB—already task organized with security forces, military police and engineers—can establish civil security and transition to other needed reconstruction tasks. Given the MEB’s diverse capability, a commander has the option to transition to multiple tasks simultaneously, instead of being forced to approach tasks linearly.

Role in Establishing Civil Control. Once civil security is established through securing individuals, facilities, infrastructure, and institutions, then the work of

establishing civil control can begin and the mechanisms such as judicial administration and rule of law can be developed. Establishing civil control is a subsidiary of the aforementioned transformational tasks and the precursor to instituting sustainable rule of law and effective governance. On an interim level, it seeks to provide rudimentary judiciary, police, and corrections systems to the conflict areas.⁴²

An intervention force for stability operations should consist of four elements: robust military forces; police-constabulary units; civil police officers; and lawyers. Such a force would provide the capability required to achieve the primary objective of restoring stability to a region establishing public order and assisting the local government to provide for its own security through the rule of law. Almost everything else can wait.⁴³

The same MEB forces used to establish civil security could also help to establish civil control. The importance of this task cannot be understated. As civil control must be built upon a foundation of civil security, the remaining tasks of essential service, governance, and economic restoration are pointless without an order of law to ensure the rights and arbitrate disputes.

Current stabilization forces lack the capacity to perform this task—with the exception of the Military Police units, which are small in number and in high demand. Recent encounters of Italian Carabinieri and French Gendarmerie give good examples as to how police units can establish security and control while training indigenous forces to take over command. True civil control, however, must accomplish tasks across the spectrum of law enforcement. This requires engagement with international war crimes courts, NGOs, and other non-military constabulary units. Stability forces must be staffed to interact with an interim legal system and enforce their needs while simultaneously performing other tasks.⁴⁴ By doctrine, the MEB can help establish an interim law

enforcement and criminal justice system; reform police, judicial, legal, and corrections systems; and support war crimes courts and tribunals.⁴⁵

Role in Restoring Essential Services and Support to Economic and Infrastructure. Restoring essential services furthers the stability process by addressing human needs. The MEB is designed with the capability to facilitate the fulfillment of this task. Military forces should focus on immediate life-sustaining provisions—such as food, water, shelter, and medical support—while aiding other civilian organizations to address the broader issues of social well being.⁴⁶ This latter category is broad, ranging from efforts to ameliorate civilian dislocation, support sustainable agriculture programs, and providing nonfood goods such as clothing and education to the population. Recognizing the complex nature of these tasks, experience suggests “that it may be appropriate to embed civilians in the deploying force to address planning for civil security and administration, restoring essential services and other reconstruction needs, and facilitating the transition to the civilian authority responsible for conducting the longer-term nation-building effort.”⁴⁷ The MEB has the staff capability to assess and plan for the issues associated with establishing essential services. Additionally, its flexible nature allows for easy augmentation with military and NGO units specialized in providing essential services.⁴⁸

Support to economic and infrastructure development builds upon the restoration of essential services toward the goal of full recovery and continued economic development. Once again, this is an area where the military is not generally in the lead. Though the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Field Force Engineering have the capability to aid the host nation in construction and energy projects, it must rely on

interagency support for most other services.⁴⁹ The MEB can contribute to establishing economic well being by offering security and improving essential services, thus helping to set the conditions for local economies to operate. In order for the host nation to take over the initiatives of the U.S. military and heal the social, economic, and political conditions that caused the war, it must have fundamental tools of sustainable economy.⁵⁰ The MEB can ensure that there is a secure environment where both micro and macro economic prosperity can thrive, and then the MEB headquarters can oversee economic stimulus initiatives through the application of special funding for infrastructure development. This can be accomplished at the local level using Commander's Emergency Response Funds to build schools and hospitals, or to assist other governmental agencies such as USAID in overseeing large water and electrical development. Any of these projects risks failure without supervision and coordination between the various relief efforts and the host nation local and national leadership.

Early Lessons Learned by the Deployment of the 1st MEB to Afghanistan

The first MEB deployed to Afghanistan in support of OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM in July 2008, with the specific missions of controlling terrain while accomplishing the tasks of route protection, infrastructure development, and rear area operations. While it is too soon to draw many conclusions, this is the only deployed example of this form of organization, and its experience may serve as a case study for how well the potential of the MEB concept works in stability operations.

The first MEB—called the 1st MEB—currently has an area of operations covering four provinces: three are predominantly stability operations while one is combat/kinetically oriented.⁵¹ The MEB is task organized with engineers, civil affairs,

support personnel, security forces, and also has an organizational relationship with the PRTs and MTTs operating in the MEB area of operations. The 1st MEB has been augmented with personnel from DOS, USAID, the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the United States Public Health Service's Commissioned Corps (USPHS), and USDA, which has increased its capability to conduct counterinsurgency, stability, and reconstruction operations simultaneously.⁵² Colonel Scott Spellmon, the current commander of the 1st MEB said, "I think the MEB in my current AO [Area of Operation] is a good fit...the HQ s a good fit for this balance of full spectrum operations. We are doing a lot on engineering, a lot of working with the local police, and lot of work with provincial and district government and the MEB staff is a good choice for command and control headquarters in this type of area of operations."⁵³

The 1st MEB, like all new organizations, has learned valuable lessons for training and operations that have been communicated to senior level Army staffs. These lessons learned will undoubtedly improve the effectiveness of the organization. Its early identified needs are mirrored by most brigade-sized organizations deployed to either Iraq or Afghanistan. They fall into two major categories: 1) the need for more augmentation of personnel and equipment with specialized and focused skills and 2) improvement of post deployment training to enable the MEB to function more efficiently. Because the 1st MEB is doing full spectrum operations—including kinetic operations—additional troops and equipment are needed to enhance its Intelligence/Surveillance/Reconnaissance (ISR) capability. If the MEB is expected to conduct the same counterinsurgency operations of BCTs, then it needs to have the ISR capability in order to be effective. The need for security sector reform and rule of law

capability is critical, and the unit needs additional police trainers, investigative trainers, and lawyers. Col Spellmon has identified the need for greater Information Operation capability to counter the Taliban's information operations. Additionally, he has identified several ways for future MEBs to take advantage of the lessons learned in order to conduct more complete and efficient home station training before deploying to combat zones.⁵⁴ These early lessons learned are not criticisms, but comments consistent with the growth of any new organization that is being tested in the rigors of a combat environment.

Way Ahead

At this time, no MEBs have been deployed in support of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM. With the fluid situation in that country and the stress that is currently being felt by the BCTs, the MEB may be a good solution for the transition of operations in Iraq. The MEB could help reduce the strain of continued troop rotations on the BCTs, while introducing more command and control structure to the stability and reconstruction forces that will need to remain in that theatre of operation. The Army should consider increasing the total number of MEBs to allow for rotations to maintain a constant presence in Afghanistan and to enable support to Iraq. Incorporating the lessons learned into training and resourcing the MEB will increase the effectiveness in further deployments.

The potential for the MEB's usage in stabilization operations—if properly planned, trained, and organized—is unlimited. The ability to deploy a ready-made force with the flexibility and capability of the MEB will greatly increase the Army's ability to achieve strategic success at the operational and tactical levels. This force can have an

immediate impact on the current fights in both combat theatres, and could very well answer the projected needs of future conflicts with non-state actors.

Many of the forces needed to conduct effective stability operations currently exist within the U.S. Army, the U.S. government, and various NGOs. But they are not unified under a command and control organization that focuses primarily on stability operations. As the capabilities of different organizations with unique skill sets are combined, they form a synergy for success in unstable environments. The MEB represent an important evolution in our doctrine and organizational structure that address the needs of the current and future operations. The MEB represents an effective command and control structure designed to harness those capabilities and focus them toward accomplishing the national objectives in a full spectrum environment.

Conclusion

The U.S. Army continues to learn and adapt lessons from the last seven years of sustained operations. The importance of stability operations in determining the overall operational success in today's environment has emerged as one of the largest lessons. U.S. military doctrine and training now reflect an increased emphasis on stability operations, and the Army is experiencing organizational change to meet the needs of current and future operations.

The employment of BCTs into Iraq and Afghanistan as the initial combat forces and then the premier counterinsurgency forces has been very effective. The PRTs and MTT also made important contributions in security force development, infrastructure development, and support to government institutions. These organization and their leaders deserve a great deal of credit for the successes achieved in each country, but

as the environment changes in each theatre we will see a continued emphasis on stability operations.

As we shift toward “soft power” and away from “hard power,” the need for more capable forces designed to meet the challenges of stability operations will increase. The doctrine and organizations will continue to evolve as the nature of the conflict, policies, and strategy change. The Army as an institution has responded to the demands and the MEB has emerged as a potential answer to the correct stabilization force question, as it has the capability to meet the present and future challenges of international conflict.

Endnotes

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